



AUSTRALIAN NATIONAL
BOTANIC GARDENS



Submission to the Inquiry into fostering and promoting the significance of Australia's National Capital



Australian Government
Parks Australia



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The Director of National Parks is pleased to provide this submission to the Inquiry into fostering and promoting the significance of Australia's National Capital conducted by the Joint Standing Committee on the National Capital and External Territories.

About The Australian National Botanic Gardens

The Australian National Botanic Gardens (ANBG) is the world's most comprehensive collection of Australian native plants, representing over 6,000 species and 78,000 plants. Australia's flora is a distinctive part of our national culture, given its relative diversity and uniqueness internationally. More than 90% of Australia's plant species are endemic and do not exist anywhere else in the world. The ANBG is the only place where people can experience such a significant collection of plants and ecosystems from across Australia in one location.

Since its official opening in 1970, the ANBG has made a significant contribution to lifting the profile of Australia's National Capital. In just over 50 years, it has emerged as a centre of excellence for plant science, conservation, horticulture, and education. It is also an award-winning ecotourism venue with over half a million visitors annually.

The ANBG is an integral component of architect Walter Burley Griffin's vision for Canberra and contributes to the aesthetic quality of the national capital. Located on the lower eastern slopes of Black Mountain, the living plant collection is displayed in 35 hectares of the 85-hectare site. The ANBG has challenged prevailing botanic garden design by presenting a bush-like landscape showcasing Australia's unique plant diversity. It has been the inspiration for many of the nation's regional botanic gardens focusing on local native flora.

The ANBG is a Commonwealth reserve declared under the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* (EPBC Act). It is managed by the Director of National Parks (DNP), a Commonwealth Corporation established under the EPBC Act, assisted by Parks Australia, a division of the Australian Government's Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water. The ANBG's purpose under the EPBC Act is to increase knowledge, appreciation and enjoyment of Australia's plant heritage by establishing, as an integrated resource, a collection of living and herbarium specimens of Australian and related plants for study, interpretation, conservation and display.

The strategic direction of the ANBG is guided by a ten-year management plan, as required under the EPBC Act for all Commonwealth reserves. Management plans are approved by the relevant minister and tabled in both houses of the Commonwealth Parliament. The *ANBG Management Plan 2022-2032* is available online at: www.parksaustralia.gov.au/botanic-gardens/management-plan.

The ANBG is listed on the Commonwealth Heritage List under the EPBC Act in recognition of its national significance for its unique landscape, environmental character and outstanding examples of landscape design and horticulture using Australian native plants. There is a key role for the ANBG to reflect the essence of Australian culture through interpreting its living collection.



The *ANBG Master Plan 2015-2035* guides development of infrastructure projects to support increased visitation, tourism and engagement opportunities.

Functions of the ANBG

Conservation: The ANBG's living plant and seed collections include more than 300 threatened species listed under the EPBC Act, and many more taxa recognised as being in decline. The collections are scientifically documented and linked to verified herbarium voucher specimens, which underpins their value in research and recovery efforts. The ANBG is also a national leader in the emerging field of 'conservation horticulture', through collaborative cross-sector conservation projects, largely focused on establishing back-up 'insurance' plant collections and growing plants for re-wilding efforts. The ANBG facilitates collaborations with Australia's leading botanic gardens to enhance their work on Australia's national biodiversity conservation agenda.

Research: through its collection of 'living laboratories', the ANBG is a concentrated hub of expertise on native plant taxonomy and evolution, seed biology, horticulture, and conservation management. The ANBG undertakes world-leading research through the National Seed Bank and the Centre for Australian National Biodiversity Research (CANBR) – a joint venture of the Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Office (CSIRO) and the DNP – which also includes the Australian National Herbarium. Given the extent and diversity of the living collection, the ANBG has also developed extensive horticultural knowledge on the propagation and cultivation requirements of native plants.

Tourism: About 520,000 visitors come to the ANBG each year from all over Australia and from around the world. It is a much loved local attraction for Canberra residents, interstate visitors and international tourists.

Education: The ANBG provides education programs for schools across Australia, allowing children to explore Australia's rich natural and cultural heritage in a living classroom. The ANBG is also developing Australia's first online education hub focusing on native plants.

The ANBG is an important reminder of Australians' increasing appreciation of their natural heritage and is considered to be of outstanding value to many Australians. This is reflected by the number of visitors to the ANBG and to its website. Strong support is provided by the Friends of the Australian National Botanic Gardens, a community support group which boasts a large active membership.



Response to Terms of Reference

1. Requirements for the National Institutions to convey a dynamic, representative national story.

As a botanic garden and national institution, the ANBG conveys a unique and engaging aspect of Australia's national story. It has a mandate to conserve its living and herbarium collections as key records of plant species as part of Australia's cultural and natural heritage; to encourage and support the cultivation, use and conservation of Australian plants and to be a custodian of the national story of Australia's unique flora.

The ANBG's scientifically documented collection of living and herbarium specimens of Australian and related plants supports diverse world-leading, multi-disciplinary scientific and horticultural research. We maintain significant records on Australia's plants as an important part of our cultural and natural heritage, and we encourage and support the cultivation, use and conservation of Australian plants.

Over the last 50 years, we have led the way in growing Australian native plants and initiating research to introduce many native plants into horticulture. Hundreds of species in our living collection are threatened in their natural habitats and we are increasingly involved in their conservation through cultivation and propagation trials and the collection of seeds for preservation in the ANBG's National Seed Bank.

Education

The ANBG provides a valued educational role for students from primary to tertiary level from across the nation, including horticultural and taxonomic training. The living collection of Australian native plants, and the related conservation and research conducted at the ANBG are at the core of education programs.

The ANBG education program has been running for over 30 years and is well established. There are currently 14 school programs offered to preschool to secondary students and 3 programs for adult audiences, with several programs focused on First Nations plant use and the diversity of plants across the country. Facilitated education programs are charged at a partial cost recovery price due to market conditions and the ANBG invests considerable resources to deliver the current programs.

In 2022, 15,603 students visited the ANBG for a learning experience, 69% of these students visited for an ANBG staff facilitated program, 31% of students visited for a teacher-guided program only. The majority of students (69%) travel from interstate as part of an excursion to Canberra and 31% of the students were from Canberra region schools.

Canberra has a strong interstate school tourism market with approximately 170,000 visiting students per year. The interstate school market is strongly driven by year 6 civics education and schools can apply for a



Parliament and Civics Education Rebate (PACER) when they visit a cultural institution for a civics related program. It should be noted that ANBG is not part of the PACER scheme.

With an emphasis on the process of lifelong learning, ANBG education services are linked with the learning standards outlined in the Australian Curriculum. The ANBG also supports horticultural training by hosting state-based apprentices and international visitors and contributes to an annual botanical internship run through the Australian National Herbarium.

As a National Institution, the ANBG is committed to inspiring students in schools across Australia. Launching late 2023, the Plant Science Learning Hub is a dynamic education platform that will engage primary school teachers and students in plant science through a series of curriculum-linked outdoor, classroom and online interactive activities and videos. Developed by ANBG's scientists and educators, the Plant Science Learning Hub uses Australia's unique plants to provide a complete learning journey through seven plant science modules from Plant Life Cycles to Ecosystems.

As technology rapidly changes and new cultural patterns evolve, new learning techniques will emerge. These new learning experiences, supplemented with the standard tools, will enable the ANBG to engage with diverse new audiences.

2. Maintaining the currency and vibrancy of Australia's national capital as a source of pride and international recognition.

The ANBG is Australia's only national institution to focus solely on Australian plants at a national scale. It also has a leading role both nationally and internationally as a centre of excellence in plant research, conservation, and education. As such, the ANBG is an international drawcard for visitors and is recognised internationally for its leading role in advancing plant science and policy.

The ANBG's location in the Nation's Capital strengthens the city's international recognition for scientific discovery and cultural pride. It is a place to display and celebrate the diversity of Australia's native flora, within a cultural and scientific institution focused on horticultural expertise and conservation projects.

The ANBG collaborates extensively both nationally and internationally. For example, it plays an important role internationally in the implementation of the Global Strategy for Plant Conservation (GSPC) and the Global Taxonomy Initiative (GTI), under the United Nations Convention on Biological Diversity. Through its hosting of the National Focal Point for the GSPC, the ANBG leads the negotiation, coordination and reporting of plant conservation targets and actions in Australia. It also provides representation to the international taxonomic community through its hosting of the Australian Focal Point for the GTI. Furthermore, the ANBG makes an important contribution to taxonomy through CANBR, where research programs and collections provide an authoritative national source of botanical data.

The ANBG is a registered scientific institution under Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES). This helps facilitate scientific exchange of specimens needed to



conduct taxonomic and species conservation research. Over recent years, the number of requests to access the diverse and in some cases extremely rare genetic material available through the ANBG has increased.

The ANBG collaborates widely with other botanic gardens in Australia and internationally, including as a member of Botanic Gardens Conservation International (BGCI). The ANBG works closely with many overseas institutions including Royal Botanic Gardens Kew in the UK, Missouri Botanic Gardens in the USA and the Naturalis Biodiversity Centre, Netherlands. Nationally, the ANBG has a leadership role in the Council of Heads of Australian Botanic Gardens Inc. (CHABG) – the peak body incorporating the eight major botanic gardens in the country. ANBG staff assist, advise and undertake conservation projects with smaller regional gardens, and play key leadership roles in our relationship with Botanic Gardens Australia and New Zealand Inc. (BGANZ).

3. Raising the profile of Australia's national capital and its symbolic importance in reflecting the character, values and identity of Australia.

The ANBG makes a significant contribution to the profile of Australia's national capital:

- the ANBG is a focal point and repository for Australia's unique national environment and living culture, bringing together a comprehensive and accessible collection of native flora.
- the ANBG is a national institution. It is a Commonwealth Reserve under the EPBC Act and is included on the Commonwealth Heritage List and the Register of the National Estate.
- the use of the site forms an integral component of Griffin's composition for Canberra.
- the ANBG contributes to the aesthetic quality of the National Capital.

As a national institution managed by the Australian Government, the ANBG has a responsibility to build and share knowledge of Australian flora, as a defining feature of our national character, values and identity. Displaying the world's most comprehensive living collection of Australian native plant species in the national capital positions the ANBG to showcase best practice in the fields of conservation, taxonomy, horticulture, and seed science.

With an aim to promote awareness, study and conservation of species diversity the ANBG has developed collaborative conservation projects that target species threatened in the wild. The ANBG currently protects more than 300 legislatively listed threatened species and many more considered to be at risk in the wild. This represents nearly a quarter of Australia's threatened taxa (as listed under the EPBC Act), and places the ANBG in a strong position to study factors that may help mitigate diversity loss. Collaborating with other Australian botanic gardens brings together a larger, coordinated ex situ



collection, enabling the sharing of research and knowledge to help better conserve more of Australia's threatened flora.

The ANBG has a prominent location within the Central National Area on the slopes of Black Mountain and close to Lake Burley Griffin. The National Capital Plan (administered by the National Capital Authority) recognises the national significance of the ANBG as a key feature of the original Griffin plan and as a landscape backdrop to central Canberra.

Friends of the Australian National Botanic Gardens

The Friends of the Australian National Botanic Gardens Inc (Friends) is a non-profit community-based organisation that plays an important role in increasing community awareness of the ANBG's scientific, educational, conservation and recreation functions. The Friends also serves as a link to encourage the use and enjoyment of the ANBG by the local community. The Friends of the ANBG have provided donations to the ANBG to support new developments and projects to the value of \$2 million since their inception in 1990. The Friends have raised these funds through membership fees and a range of their own fund-raising activities.

4. Consider the importance of Australia's national capital in highlighting our sporting, cultural and tourism potential.

The ANBG strives to connect people with Australia's rich natural and cultural heritage in ways that will inspire them to understand and value Australia's plants and ecosystems and contribute to responsible environmental stewardship.

The ANBG is a nature-based ecotourism destination for visitors seeking passive recreation, learning opportunities and peaceful reflection. The ANBG is Eco Certified by EcoTourism Australia. Enjoyment of nature and culture can foster positive community attitudes towards botanic gardens and Australia's natural history and can motivate visitors to learn about the value of the ANBG and its collection. The ANBG provides unique experiences for visitors to the 35 hectares of diverse themed landscapes from the coastal rainforests to the Red Centre. Visitors can explore the temperate and subtropical rainforests from Tasmania to southern Queensland, experience the red sand and desert plants of Central Australia and the beauty of Western Australia wildflowers in bloom, all only minutes from Parliament House and the centre of Canberra.

The ANBG has established cooperative relationships with other like-minded national institutions in Canberra, including the National Museum of Australia, Questacon, the National Library and the National Arboretum. These relationships range from exchange of display materials and education activities to participation on advisory committees.



The ANBG contributes significantly to the tourism sector as a destination, but also in working with the National Capital Attractions Association, Visit Canberra and through cooperation with the Canberra Convention Bureau.

Improving visitor services to attract and cater for community interests and diverse audiences is part of our planning for suitable recreational visitor experiences that grow the reach of the ANBG as a national institution.

The ANBG uses visitor studies and ongoing evaluation tools to monitor the quality of visitor services (aesthetics, facilities, services and engagement) and visitor benefits (goals and positive outcomes relating to, for example, learning, socialising, productivity and nature). These methods provide comprehensive visitor satisfaction data that enables us to determine trends, measure performance and identify target markets for which to plan new enjoyable visitor experiences. A survey of Visitor Service Quality at the ANBG was undertaken by the University of South Australia in May 2019. The survey reported that 99% of visitors were satisfied with their visit and 98% of visitors indicated they would recommend the ANBG. 36% of respondents considered themselves as a 'tourist'.

The ANBG has been actively developing new forms of public engagement to increase audience participation, environmental education outcomes and new revenue streams. This has resulted in a steady increase in visitation in recent years (pre COVID) and a return to 2019 visitation levels in 2022.

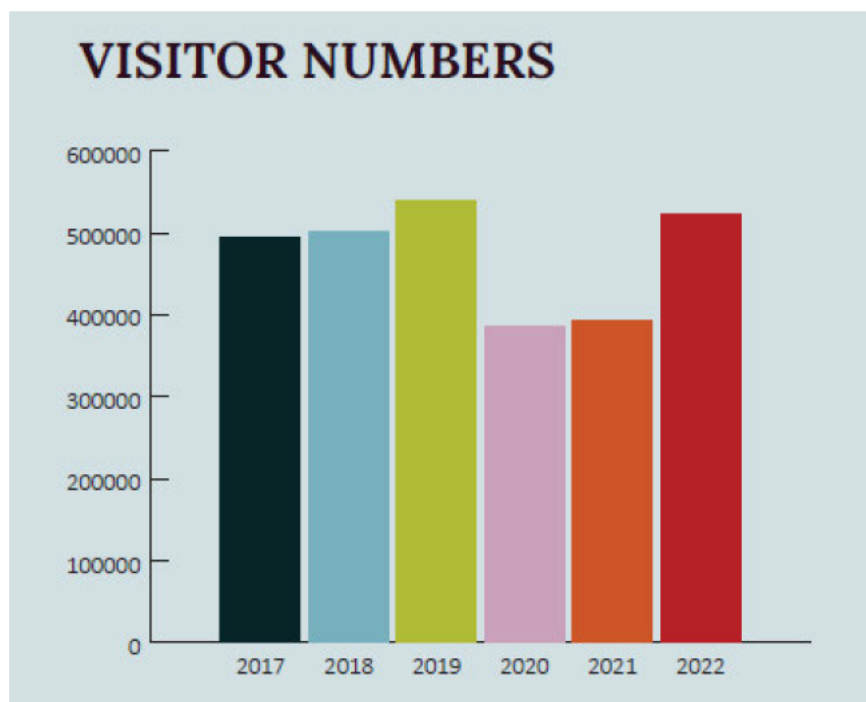


Figure 1. Total number of visitors to the ANBG per year from 2017 to 2022.



Since the announcement of the Master Plan in 2015 a range of new attractions and experiences have been established such as:

New Attractions: The Paperbark Treehouse allows visitors to come eye-to-eye with birds and to become part of the tree canopy. This and other recent attractions, such as the Banksia Garden and Bushland Nature Walk, have increased the range of visitor experiences and attracted new audiences to the ANBG.



Images (L-R): Paperbark Treehouse; Banksia Garden.

MEGAfauna trail: This event, conducted over the school holidays in July, showcases the Pleistocene Megafauna in the landscapes they once inhabited. Special night lighting is also added for ticketed evening tours. This event has now boosted July into one of the highest visitation periods during the year with 50,000 visitors.



Images: Examples of the Megafauna trail.

AfterDark Tours: A range of specialist lighting installations exists along trails in the ANBG such as the Rainforest and the Red Centre Gardens. This has enabled the establishment of ticketed AfterDark tours for the public and are also available for school groups during weekday evenings.



Images: Examples of the Enlighten Festival at the ANBG.

Enlighten Festival: the ANBG has been involved many times in the delivery of night-time events and activities during the Enlighten festival, benefiting from the interstate marketing campaigns delivered by Visit Canberra.



Image: Sunset cinema at the ANBG.

Hosting Commercial events: the ANBG has actively encouraged new commercial events to be held within the ANBG subject to licence fees and conditions. The most successful of these events is Sunset Cinema. This event operates throughout summer, attracting a younger audience to the ANBG.



5. The needs of existing infrastructure and identifying future infrastructure needs to facilitate a), b), c) and d) above.

The Master Plan 2015 – 2035 www.anbg.gov.au/gardens/about/management/master-plan.html sets out guiding principles for the site with a prioritised sequence of works to improve visitation and the visitor experience, increase revenue and facilitate the conservation and expansion of the ANBG's collection – its living plants and seed bank.

The key principles for the Master Plan are:

- Display excellence and innovation in the design and alteration of new and existing infrastructures.
- Achieve a distinguished level of sustainability.
- Minimise adverse impacts on fauna.
- Refine visitor circulation and wayfinding throughout the site.
- Minimise ongoing maintenance and funding.
- Clarify staff workflow efficiencies.
- Resolve key occupational health and safety areas.
- Improve user access and facilities.
- Apply a high level of sustainability to visitor and staff amenities.
- Maintain water and energy efficiency to a high level of sustainability.

The ANBG has commenced implementing Stage 1 of the Master Plan with the following status:

- Ian Potter National Conservatory – \$12 million Conservatory is currently under construction. The Conservatory will open in late 2023.
- New National Seed Bank – construction is planned to commence in the second half of 2023.
- Bushland Precinct walking trail – opened in December 2016.
- Public Art Commission – The Paperbark Treehouse opened in February 2018, funded by the Friends of the ANBG.

The Ian Potter National Conservatory is a key new attraction identified as part of the Master Plan. The Conservatory will be a national showcase for tropical Australian native flora from the far north and islands including rare and threatened species. The Conservatory will become a major attraction in Canberra and will interpret the rich story of Australia's tropical flora. The Ian Potter Foundation donation of \$1.9 million is the largest donation received in the history of the ANBG.



Investment in the future stages of the Master Plan will benefit all Australians now and into the future - preserving, conserving and displaying Australia's native flora. Future developments planned in the Masterplan include:

- Event Amphitheatre
- New Cafe/Function Centre
- New Visitor Centre
- Children's Garden
- New Alpine House and replacement of nursery greenhouses
- Upgrade of services infrastructure
- New entrance and carpark reconfiguration
- Development of ecotourism opportunities in the Bushland Precinct with commercial partners
- Pedestrian overpass to the Bushland Precinct

The timeframe for implementing future stages of the Masterplan is dependent on the availability of funding. The ANBG is pursuing a range of funding options such as philanthropic donations that, in combination with seeking future Australian Government funding, will assist the ANBG to fully realise the Master Plan.

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